



November 30, 2016

# Social Development Centre

— WATERLOO REGION —

Sarah Marsh, Councillor, Ward 10  
Dave Schnider, Councillor, Ward 2  
Kitchener City Hall

Greetings Sarah and Dave:

Thank you for taking time to meet with Devon Sivill, President of our Board of Directors and myself to discuss the Social Development Centre's 2017 community grant application. It was helpful for us to share our progress in our priority areas and to better understand your perspectives on our work.

When we met you raised two main points. You told us that we were not communicating frequently or specifically enough with you about our work. Second, you sought clarification from us about what impact our work has on the Kitchener community. You further advised us about your concern that counting contacts is not effective for measuring impact on the people and communities that we serve.

In response to your concerns, we reviewed our communication activities with Council since the start of the current Council term. In that time, we have sent 16 communication updates which included invitations to you and your colleagues to attend community events which we have been proud to host. We have met twice with most Councillors and have made four presentations to Committees or Council.

We understand that in our increasingly wired world it is easy for any of us to fall victim to "information overload". We also know that as Councillors, with so much to keep track of, it may be hard to stay on top of everything all the time. To help us keep you better informed, we ask that you engage with us directly to tell us what outreach tools and communication styles would work best for yourselves and Council generally so we can make adjustments that work for you. After all, it's important to us that you feel as connected to our good work as we do!

As a community based social planning organization, we know evaluation is important. Understanding the needs of the community and the outcomes of system change is fundamental to our work. We implement good evaluation practice in our work and offer training to others to help them as well.

We have given much attention to finding cost effective ways to monitor our activities so we can assess outcomes in two primary areas:

- People being better informed, more involved and able to act on what is important to them and
- Positive system change that meets social needs.

Each year we provide statistics in our annual grant application that demonstrate positive outcomes for those we serve. In 2015, well over 500,000 contacts were better informed, more than 3,000 contacts got involved and we

estimate that at least 5,000 were more able to take action on an important problem. Kitchener residents make up 60-70% of the participants in our various activities. It is these outcomes that Kitchener's annual investment supports.

Despite reduced staff and hours of operation, we have had over 6,000 telephone service contacts in 2016, slightly more than last year to this point. In addition to the information and action planning support provided this year, we have helped 272 families get hydro subsidies, saving them, in total, an estimated \$132,000 a year.

*Contacts* are the basic unit of service for our organization and the first step in evaluation. Additional counts such as the number of activities, products, policy submissions that result from our work is also appropriate. Most contacts we have are short term and anonymous, so immediate feedback at the point of contact or other metrics about the contact (such as topic or length of time spent) help to tell the story of the outcome of these contacts.

We are well positioned to provide a range of community level data and analysis to help evaluate community impact. Community level evaluation is quite complex and costly to do. Approaches that we have long used (e.g. developmental evaluation) are now being recognized by the professional evaluation community as emerging 'new' models.

Tools we have developed in our work have proven useful to help us guide our work. For example, the we have started to assess Decent Lives and Strong Neighbourhoods to enable us to better understand social needs and changes resulting from neighbourhood level interventions and activities. Having a tool to monitor and track community level data builds on work we have done for many years and will help us assess our work within a broader community context. As this tool is intended to be sharable, we hope others will find it to be useful to their work as well.

We trust this clarifies the outcomes of our work and the impact we have in the community.

To recap our Tier 1 grant request for 2017, we are asking that Council retain the same investment as for 2016 and to work with us to increase the annual investment to reach a target of \$100,000, the level it would be at now if cuts had not been made in 2010 and again last year. This investment would enable the Centre to fulfill its full mandate for social planning, community development, social policy analysis and social research and would be about 25% of the Centre's overall budget. With continued funding, we propose to:

- Build a year round **Neighbourhood Connections Program**, scaling up the current contributions we make to the Festival of Neighbourhoods through the annual *Neighbourhood Connections Award* and neighbourhood engagement blitzes. In so doing, we will systematically engage and support in less advantaged neighbourhoods with a focus on renters as these residents are less likely to get involved in civic life.
- To anchor this field work in the broader community and social policy environments, we will continue citizen forums, social policy analysis; and tracking Decent Lives and Strong Neighbourhoods.

Sustained investments from the City enables us to do the good work we do to find solutions that improve quality of life for everyone in Kitchener. With your support, as key decision makers on behalf of the Kitchener community, we can ensure that everyone, particularly those with limited resources, can play a role in addressing current civic challenges and in working with others to prepare for the future.

Sincerely,



Trudy Beaulne  
Executive Director